

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 18, 2011

Agenda Item: Proposed Full Curl Habitat Acquisition

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Tentative Approval

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

Glacier Bank of Kalispell, Montana, owns this 440-acre piece. This ranch was recently acquired by the bank through a loan default. The land provides important spring, fall and winter habitat for the Perma-Paradise (Knowles Creek) bighorn sheep herd. The highly nutritious 110-acre irrigated field of alfalfa and grass provide critical spring habitat for gravid ewes. A few sheep use the property during the summer. The rock ledges on the property provide secure lambing sites along with important escape habitat. The Perma-Paradise herd has an estimated current population of 250-275 bighorns. An estimated 75-100 sheep utilize this property during the winter and spring seasons. Hunter access in HD 124 is very limited. This property provides critical access to adjacent Department of Natural Resource land and to the adjacent Lolo National Forest. In addition, the land has 1 5/8 miles of Flathead River frontage. About 20-50 mule deer frequent the property. There is some use by black bears and an occasional mountain lion.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP has received a letter of support from the Montana Wild Sheep Foundation and verbal support from the Plains/Thompson Falls Ranger District of the Lolo National Forest. Support is expected from the Sanders County Commission and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe as well as from local sportsmen.

Alternatives and Analysis:

- 1) No action. This option would miss an opportunity to conserve important fish and wildlife habitat critical for bighorn sheep.
- 2) Glacier Bank is not likely to hold this property and it will be eventually sold. FWP could propose to purchase a conservation easement from the new owner but the expense would be high and the outcome unknown.
- 3) FWP could propose to wait and purchase fee-ownership from the new owner. The expense would be significantly higher and the outcome unknown.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends that the commission grant permission to negotiate the terms and fee-title purchase of this property with Glacier Bank. This will allow FWP to fully develop this proposed project and address any public issues or concerns.

Proposed Motion

I move that the Commission grant FWP preliminary approval to negotiate a fee-title purchase on 440 acres of land owned by Glacier Bank as proposed.